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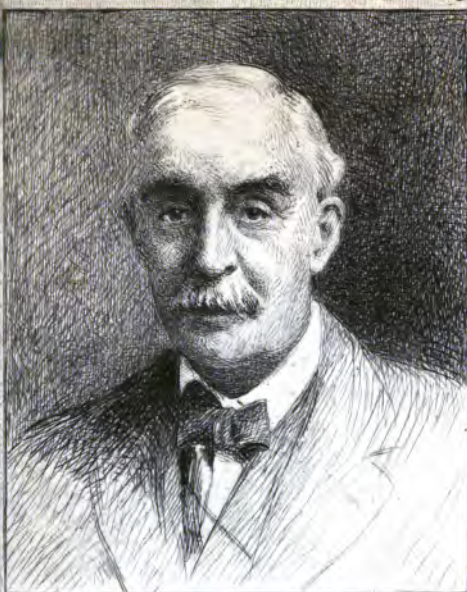
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Bird, Robert.

A CHILD'S RELIGION

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"JESUS, THE CARPENTER OF NAZARETH"

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & CO., LTD.

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A CHILD'S RELIGION.



INTRODUCTION.

WHEN Jesus taught in Galilee, the five books of Moses, called "The Law," had been fenced round by the Religious teachers of past times, with quite ten thousand propositions, termed "The hedge of the law." These were the growth of centuries of theological scholarship, and the peasantry were told to believe and obey, or they could not have Eternal Life. The Religion of to-day, with its creeds, articles, catechisms, and confessions, the work of many earnest theologians of past years, presents similar difficulties to

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the young. But there is a movement towards simplicity and breadth, and while some of these difficulties are being dealt with and set aside, others are being silently allowed to drop out of sight. And this is not surprising, when we consider, that in ten lines of the Westminster Confession of Faith, fifty propositions may be found regarding God which young people are expected to know, if they would be considered orthodox Christians.

Can this be Christianity? Is Religion not a simple thing, which children and ignorant people can easily understand, and accept? True Religion must be universal, and to be universal it should be capable of comprehension by children and unlearned people. Christianity must therefore be very simple, else were Jesus wrong when, standing among a crowd of Galilean shepherds and

field workers, He thanked His Heavenly Father for the simplicity of His message.

The fewer propositions Religion presents, the more people will be found to accept it. One proposition such as, that there is a God, might be agreed to by all. Two, such as, that God is a Person, would be agreed to by fewer. Three, such as, that God is a Person, yet Three Persons, would be agreed to by fewer still. Each proposition throws off its hundreds, until, starting with God, it is easy to see that many are hindered and stopped by a Religion presented to them in the creeds, articles, catechisms and confessions of Christendom, with their countless propositions. Indeed, the existence of so many Christian sects, and the differences which separate them, show the effect of these propositions upon the people they were intended

to unite. It is not however my intention to treat of these differences, for my work lies within a circle which ends where creeds begin. Christianity in any form is a boon to men, and it will be sufficient for me to consider the foundation on which all forms of Christianity rise, and neither to praise nor blame the varied structures which have been built thereon.

A child's Religion cannot require the acceptance of hundreds of abstruse propositions, else Religion in a child were impossible. It must lie within smaller compass, in a few simple things which every one, young or old, ignorant or learned, whether he knows it by the name of Christianity or no, does, and must, accept or reject. All admit God's influence to be essential and all-powerful. He is thus in direct communication

with each person, and while others may aid the choice, their aid is essential to no one. The question is directly put to each, for it is within us. Will you obey God? And we do, and must, answer Him in thoughts and deeds. He makes His will known, our choice is free, and daily we either accept or reject, follow or depart from this heavenly guidance.

Jesus has shown, the Bible teaches, and Clergymen tell us week by week, that *to know and obey God is true Religion*, and the purpose of all Churches and all worship. Very few men, indeed, deny this, but Jesus *has shown that this is the Christian Religion*.

Men desire to know the best that can be known of God, and most are agreed that this should be learned early, and can best be learned when a child. King Solomon

has said that the knowledge of God is true wisdom, and that they who seek this wisdom early, shall find it. Parents should therefore teach their children sound fundamental truth about God, which will not change as they grow older. The words which Moses addressed to the Jewish parents in the rocky valley by the Dead Sea, before they entered Palestine, though spoken of teaching the hard Mosaic law, are true of our gentler Christianity.

Hear, O Israel !
God ! our God ! is God alone !
Thou shalt love God, thy God !
With all thine heart, and soul, and might.
And the words which I command thee this day,
Shall be upon thine heart.
Thou shalt teach them diligently
Unto thy children,
Thou shalt talk of them,
When thou sittest in thine house,

And when thou walkest by the way,
And when thou liest down,
And when thou risest up.

And the words of King Solómon to the
Jewish children are a stirring sequel to those
of Moses the lawgiver, to their fathers and
mothers.

My son, keep the Commandments
Of thy father,
And do not forsake
The teaching of thy mother :
Bind them always about thy neck !
When thou walkest,
They shall lead thee ;
When thou awakest,
They shall talk with thee.
For their commandment
Is a lamp,
And their teaching
Is light.

Many parents who are earnestly seeking
to lead their children in the right paths, are

asking whether they need teach them all the dreary doctrines and definitions which they themselves learned with such difficulty, and forgot with such ease; or if there be not a better way to guide their little feet in the footprints of the Carpenter of Nazareth. They are enquiring for the simple way which He knew, which He taught, and in which He walked. The Religious development of the age entitles our children to a simpler Christianity, and it were indeed a grievous wrong to bleed their innocent feet among the thorns of abandoned traditions, and to feed their confiding minds with beliefs which are no longer believed, and which would have to be unlearned in later years.

This little book has been written primarily to teach simple Christianity to the author's children, and is published in the hope that

it may meet the wants of some parents, the intensity of whose religious convictions will not permit them to teach as the Religion of Jesus, things which they do not regard as essential to that knowledge and obedience towards God, that good life which was shown in Him, and which they so earnestly desire their children to possess.

Amid the infinite variety of men's minds, some find benefit in one manner of worship, and some in another,—for there is good in them all,—but whatever religious method a child may ultimately adopt, that which is at first presented to him should be of the plainest, and he ought to know that one or two great and simple things are all that are essential to a good life.

A simpler Christianity for the young is urgently wanted. And looking at Religion

in a child, I have sought to show that it is a natural part of him, just as life and thought are, and have endeavoured to point out the simple Religion which is essential and inevitable, and to indicate that while there are additions, the result of the earnest labours of good men, that these additions may be helpful to some, and a hindrance to some, but are essential to no one. *Simple Christianity is Jesus' way of knowing and obeying God,—His way to be good,—and in this there are two things which are essential.*

To know God :

To obey God.

And from these, all good things flow.

In the following pages, and within the circle which I have described, I have endeavoured to set forth a simple exposition of this. The little chapters may be either

read, or explained to the child, with such additions as the peculiarities of the parent may suggest,—for a mother alone possesses the golden key to every ward of her child's mind,—keeping ever steadily in view, that the simplest things are the greatest, that complexity is weakness, that human knowledge is limited, and that to everything there is not an answer. In quoting from the Bible, I have paraphrased freely for the young. And so, at the most sacred shrine on earth, a mother's knee, trusting in her truth, overshadowed by her love, will the child drink of the crystal spring of Christianity in its simplicity, sweetness, strength, and early learn that he has the presence of God within him, telling him what is right for him to do, and that it is the first and noblest duty of his opening life, the only

source of joy, strength, and peace in this world, to love, honour, and obey his Heavenly Father.

It has been said that it is essential to the right religious training of a child, to begin by telling him that through some antecedent cause which he cannot understand, all he thinks and does is bad, and that he deserves to be terribly punished; and that he must believe this, before he can think or do anything good. Rather would I have him know that he has the presence of his Heavenly Father within him, and that by His guidance he can easily and naturally be good, and refuse to be bad, and so avoid the doubts, terrors, and punishments which wait on badness. Does life begin with God supreme in our children? Some theologians say that a devil is supreme.

But in the children of the peasantry of Galilee, Jesus saw the pure ones of His kingdom—each mother sees an angel in her child, and the answer of every parent's heart is for God.

HOW TO BE GOOD.

VEINS of gold in the crystal rock are sometimes pure and shining, and sometimes so thin that they can scarcely be seen. And there is a thing which everybody has, young and old, rich and poor, and it is greatest and purest in the best. It is called *Religion*. You have often heard that word, but do you know exactly what it means? My child, you cannot know too soon, for you will hear a great deal about it in your life. And wise men tell us that it is the greatest thing we can think about.

Religion, is the way to know and obey God, our

Heavenly Father.—The Way to be good, to be righteous ; for righteousness is just right doing. This may seem a difficult and far-off thing to you, but it is really not so, for it is very simple and near. It is going on with you and me every day, although we may not have noticed it much, and may never have given it a name ; for Religion is a part of us, just as living and thinking are. The vein of gold may be pure and shining, or thin and poor, but there is some of this gold of Religion in every one. We are always thinking, or not thinking, so we are always being good, or not being good, obeying, or not obeying God. To speak the truth is to obey our Heavenly Father, for He tells us to do so. So is being kind. To be cruel, or to say what is not the truth, is to disobey Him, to do something different from what He tells us to do.

All little boys and girls would like to be able to read, that they might know the delightful stories that are written in books, and some day you will be able, and I hope then that you will often read the Bible, which is the greatest of all books. But, before you can read, you should know about this thing called Religion, which is ever going on with every one of us, that you may understand the most precious thing in the world, how best to know and obey God. How it begins, how it grows, what makes it greater and stronger; how simple and full of love, joy, and peace it is. And that you may also know, that the Christian Religion, the Religion of your father and mother is just *Jesus' way of knowing and obeying God*, His way to be good, and that His way is the best and simplest, the easiest and happiest for all little children.

Many things have been written about the Religion of Jesus, and of His way to be good, which you could not understand, and with which you need not trouble yourself, for they are so difficult to believe and so hard to follow, that they often hinder little children from loving Him and trying to be like Him, as I wish you to do. But His way is simple, joyous, easy, such as children can quickly understand, and which every child has a natural wish to know.

You have seen red roses in a garden, how they open more and more each day, growing ever lovelier and sweeter, and you like to know that it is the sun which gives them their deep crimson colour. You are like a little sheltered rose in a sunny garden,—for you know how sweet little children are with

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their bright faces and sunny hair,—and you will be glad to know that it is your Heavenly Father who gives little children their sweetness and joy. What He is, and how He does this, is what I am about to tell you. This is wisdom of the best, and you would like to be wise and good: for the wise King Solomon, who wrote much in the Bible for his own and other little children, says, that the knowledge of our Heavenly Father and reverence for Him, are the beginning of wisdom and understanding. And King David, Solomon's father, who, when a boy, was singularly brave, beautiful, and good, says in one of his songs, which are called Psalms, that every one is happy that has God to help him, and whose hope is in Him.

You will remember, then, that Religion is the way to be good, that every day you

are being good, or not being good, and that Jesus' way is the best way, a way of love, joy, and peace to all who try to be like Him.

WAITING ON GOD.

EVERY little child should do what is right, and not do what is wrong. We all agree to that, but perhaps you have never thought how we know to agree to it so quickly; who it is that tells us at once to agree, for we do not need to think about it. It is our Heavenly Father who does this. He tells us what is right for us to do, and of course everything else would be wrong. His presence is in every one, *is in you*, making known His will, so that He is always near, to help you to be good. King Solomon, in one of the books of the Bible,

after speaking about his life in every way, says at the end, that after all has been considered, this is the conclusion of the matter, our whole duty in this world is to reverence and obey God. And the prophet Micah, who was a poor man who lived long ago in a small village of Palestine, also says, that our Heavenly Father shows us what is good for us to do, and what He asks of us is that we should do what is right, and be kind, and walk humbly with Him.

Some people say that *to know and obey God* is not easy, but it is strange that they should say so, when they believe that He is almighty, and that He helps us to do what is right. But really it is not hard. As I have said, we are doing it every day, though not as much as we might do, for no one is ever so good as he would like

to be. We learn from Jesus that it is easy to obey our Heavenly Father if we are willing to do it, for, standing in his white tunic in the shade, one hot summer day, and speaking to the simple country people of Galilee, gardeners, shepherds, farmers, gathered together up among the hills in their strange bright coloured dresses, He told them so in loving words like these :—

Take My commandments upon you,
And learn from Me ;
For I am gentle and lowly in heart,
And you shall find rest.
For My commands are easy,
And My burden is light.

Every little child should pray to God his Heavenly Father, to guide and keep him each day, and help him to be good as He would have him be, for that is the simplest and best way of waiting on Him.

You will watch then for His guidance, and obey Him; and if you really wish to do it you will find obedience light, easy, joyful, as Jesus said, doing gladly what is right, and not doing what is wrong. And that is Religion,—that is right doing, that is being good.

We learn much from the Bible about praying to, and waiting on God in this and other ways, from the good men who wrote of the joy and peace of doing so, and of the guidance which they received. David, King of Jerusalem, in his joyous songs says, "Be strong and take courage, wait thou on God!" "Be still before God, and wait patiently for Him." And the prophet Jeremiah, who was the son of a priest of the Golden Temple, in his beautiful poem, called in the Bible his "Lamentations," says

that it is good for us to hope, and wait quietly on God, and that He is kind to all that seek Him and wait on Him. And Isaiah, another good man who wrote the greatest poem in the Bible, says that they who wait on God shall grow better and better in doing good.

The Psalms in the Bible are some of them the joyful songs and some the earnest prayers of the good men who wrote them. They were written, it is thought, by King David and his chief musicians, to be sung by men and boys to flutes and silver trumpets, in their great church called the Tabernacle, and by the people in their houses and meeting places, and they tell us of the way in which we should wait on God in words like these :—

Teach me to do Thy will,
For thou art my God !
Let Thy Spirit lead me
In the way that is right.
Shew me Thy way, O God !
Teach me Thy paths.
Guide me in Thy truth, and teach me ;
For Thou art the God of my salvation !
On Thee do I wait, all the day long.

And that is why churches and chapels are built, and why men speak in them, and why people sing and pray there. They are waiting on God, each after his own manner, that they may be guided in the right way, as I hope you will ever do. And that is why you say your prayers : for in doing so you are waiting on your Heavenly Father, and asking Him to be with you, and with all whom you love. And men find that this waiting can best be done in stillness, not hurriedly, not fretfully, but in quietness and in peaceful confidence and

trust in our Heavenly Father. And that is why some people worship God in perfect silence.

Remember, then, that the most precious thing in the world is to know what God your Heavenly Father would have you do, and that you will learn this by praying to Him, and asking Him to make His will known, that you may do it, and that this is ever easy and joyous.

WHAT IS GOD?

LITTLE children often ask "What is God?" and their parents like to hear them asking, for it shows that they are thinking about Him, the greatest and most joyful thing they can think about. Now, I wish you to understand at once that you can ask many questions which cannot be answered, and that, even if they could be answered, the answers would be of very little use in helping you to be good; *and it is how to be good that we are talking about just now, and nothing else.* I cannot tell you as fully and clearly about God as I can about Jesus, and the reason is quite plain.

When Jesus lived in Galilee, men saw Him day after day, going about the roads and villages in His white tunic and with His calm, sweet face, always saying and doing kind things, and these men have written down what they heard and saw; but no one has ever seen God, as Jesus was seen, although good men have written much of the will of God, as it was made known to them.

And there is another reason why I cannot tell you all about our Heavenly Father, and it is this. He is so much greater than we are, that it is impossible for us ever to understand all about Him, and we should not expect to do it. All good men say this of God, and the Bible teaches us so in the solemn words of Isaiah, when he speaks of God's thoughts as not our thoughts, nor our ways His ways,

and that as the sky is higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. And the most learned Paul, who was trained among the greatest religious teachers of his time, and who left them and became a follower of Jesus, in a long letter to the Christians in Rome, speaking of the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, says that His judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past tracing out. And again, in the Book of Job, after speaking of the sky and clouds, and light and darkness, the writer says, that while these are the outer parts of God's ways, only a little portion is ever heard of Him. But, as I have said, while we cannot know everything about our Heavenly Father, *He has made known all that we need know to be good.*

When we read in the Bible of men having seen God, it is that they have felt His presence, and have thought what He is like, for Spirit cannot be seen. I cannot therefore tell you what our Heavenly Father looks like, and that matters very little, for if I could tell you that He is bright as the sun, or white as the snow, it would not make you love and obey Him more, for you love and obey Him because He is your Heavenly Father who loves you and tells you what is right to do; not because He is bright or dazzling. Very few pictures have been drawn of God, and these have made Him like a great and glorious man; but all such pictures are false and foolish, and had better never have been drawn. You might as well draw the wind as a splendid winged horse, or fire as a fierce glittering dragon, which would not

give you the least idea of what wind and fire really are. But I can tell you something of *what our Heavenly Father is, and does*, and that is far better than knowing whether He has a shape, or is bright as flame, or white as snow.

You have been told that the things which we really require to know in order to be good, are few and simple, and we should be very careful rightly to know these precious things, and ought not to be disappointed because there are questions about our Heavenly Father which no one can answer; for, while we might like to know them, as long as they do not hinder us from being good, we can be content to let them alone as things which we do not know, and do not need to know.

Children ask strange questions about other

things than God, which cannot be answered, and which they must be content to leave unanswered. I have heard of them asking how many stars are in the sky, and no one can tell them. There is a white band across the heavens in which the stars are so thick that it is called the "milky way," a band, we believe, of sparkling worlds, but no one knows their number. Almost all little children ask "Who made God," and they are quite right to ask, but nobody can tell them, and it is one of these things that they need not trouble themselves about, because whether they get an answer or do not get an answer has nothing to do with *how to be good*, which, you will remember, is the one thing we are speaking about. We see the stars in the blue sky at night, and with a telescope we can see more stars, and every larger telescope shows more

stars, still farther and farther away, and men tell us of the laws by which they move in great circles, and we believe that there are stars beyond the farthest stars we see, and that they may have other and different laws to regulate them as they move in beautiful order. And while we know about our Heavenly Father from His presence within us, and from the world we see around us, yet we cannot tell what He is like, or what He does elsewhere, but we believe that He who is so good to us cannot be anything but good in all He does.

Little children ask who made the stars, and what they are made of, but we cannot tell. And though we cannot see the stars in the day time, we know that like spikes of silver they will tremble forth over the skies at night, and the Bible teaches us, and

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most wise men believe, that they were begun by our Heavenly Father, who is so great and good. And when children ask in the same curious way, what God is like, and who made God, we cannot tell; but we can explain that we do not think God was ever "made" as children call it, and that we do not need to know in order to be good, but that we do know from His presence within us, that our Heavenly Father *is* and that He is *good*, and that He tells us what to do, if we would be good also. And men believe what the Bible teaches, that God is the cause of all good in the world around us, as well as in ourselves.

You will remember, then, that there are very many wonders about other things than our Heavenly Father, which cannot be explained, and that all you need know in

order to be good is, *that God is*, that He makes His will known to you, and that He is the cause of all that is good in you and in the world around you.

GOD'S PRESENCE IN US.

YOU have seen a beautiful sunset when the clouds were steeped in crimson, and feathers of gold lay low in the green sky along the tops of the purple hills; and perhaps you have seen a sunrise too, when hues of softest rose blushed over the silvery clouds, and the birds awoke in the green woods. We call the sun "he," when we say "He shines upon the hills," but we do not mean that the sun is a man. We also call the moon "she," when we say, "She looks through the clouds," but we do not mean that the moon is a woman. So we call our Heavenly Father

"He," although we do not mean that God is a great and glorious man, and yet calling Him "He," has encouraged people to think of Him as in appearance like a man. But, as I have told you, we must guard against thinking of Him in that way.

When we call God "He," and our "Heavenly Father," as Jesus did, we mean that He is loving, forgiving, wise, and great, excelling and abounding beyond measure in all good qualities of the mind, which we love in good fathers and mothers, and in all good people, and that He is the cause of all good in us and in the world; but we do not mean, and you must not think that in shape and appearance He is like your own father, or like anything you have ever seen. And yet we call Him our Heavenly Father, for, as I have said, He is the cause of all that is

good in us. The real meaning of the word God is "Greatest of all," for we cannot think of anything greater than He, who is wisest, kindest, strongest, best, and greatest of all, and although no one has ever seen Him as Jesus was seen, yet we know Him. John, the loving disciple and cousin of Jesus, who lived with Him in Galilee, says in his life of Jesus in the Bible, that no man has seen God at any time, but that Jesus has made Him known to us.

No one ever knew more of God than Jesus did, and, speaking one day to a country woman who had come out of the town to get water in her red clay jar at the well of Sychar, amid the hills of Samaria, He told her that *God is a Spirit*. And think as we may about our Heavenly Father, we cannot get beyond this simple truth which Jesus told that woman.

No doubt you wonder what "Spirit" means. It means something which cannot be seen or heard or felt, but is known to us; and that is what God is. We cannot see the air, but we can feel it, and although we cannot see or feel our Heavenly Father, we know of His presence in us by Him telling us what is right for us to do. Thus, while we do not know what He looks like, or whether He is like anything that we have ever seen or thought of, we know what He *is* and *does*, and that He is good and loving above all that we can think; and this we know from His presence in us.

As I have said, our Heavenly Father is the cause of all goodness in the world, whether it be in the little black girl far away in Africa who soothes her brother's tears, and yet who never heard the name of God; or

the little English boy who tells the truth, and whose mother speaks to him about his Heavenly Father every day. All our good thoughts and feelings are caused by Him, and we can tell of His presence in us by the constant guidance which we receive towards what is right. *If you are not sure of this, try it.* It is of no use to believe it if you do not try it. If we are thirsty, it is of no use to know of water: we must drink. If you wish to know, if you wish to be sure, that you have God's guidance within you, you must test it, rely on it as the rule of your life, and you will know of its simple truth.

When speaking to the crowds of people in the Golden Temple on one of the days of their great Autumn Festival of Bowers, at Jerusalem, some of the leading Judeans found

fault with Jesus for what He said, and to them He replied in words like these :—" *What I say to you is not Mine own, but the will of My Father in Heaven who sent Me. If any one wishes to do His will, he shall know whether what I say is from Him, or if I speak from Myself.*" And so, if we wish to be sure that our Heavenly Father makes His will known to us, to guide us in what is right for us to do, and if we really wish to obey Him, as Jesus told the people, *we must try it*, and then we shall know for ourselves that Jesus spoke the truth. And having found that we have a gentle Guide that tells us what is right to do, and checks us if we would do wrong, let us pause and ask ourselves, "How do I know what is right? Who tells me? I do not tell myself, no person tells me, and yet I know." It is some good thing, not

yourself, that tells you what is right to do ; some good thing which you cannot see or feel or hear, but which is known to you. It is the presence of your Heavenly Father within you, *of God, a Spirit*. And you will try again and again for a month, a year if need be, to make sure ; praying for this gentle guidance, waiting for it, yielding yourself up to it. It is well worth a fair trial, *for your whole life hangs on it*.

The greatest heroes among men have done their great deeds because they believed and knew they were doing the will of God ; and in the simple things of your life, like a good, obedient child, you will yield yourself up, as Jesus did, to the same perfect and loving Guide.

Remember, then, that your Heavenly Father is a Spirit, and that His presence is within you,

as your gentle and sure Guide, and that you can make certain that you have His presence near you, and ever your Friend, by trying, trusting, proving it.

GOD, OUR HEAVENLY FATHER.

THE rose that is to have beautiful flowers must keep in the light, and get as much sunshine as it can, opening its very heart of gold to the sun. In darkness it would have no red flowers. The apple tree that would have fruit must be in the light, if sweet ruddy apples are ever to hang among its green leaves. If we wish to be good, if we long for the knowledge of God our Heavenly Father, as the most precious thing, then we should earnestly wait on Him, and rejoice that He is our Guide. John the loving disciple of Jesus, tells us that the presence of God is in every little child in this world, like a

light to guide him. And when Moses, not long before his death, spoke to the Israelites about God, when they were about to go into Palestine without him, he gave them this message as their leader.

“What I command you this day is not too wonderful for you, nor is it far off. It is not in the skies that you should say, who shall go up and bring it down to us, that we may hear and do it. The word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.” And Paul, who lived in Jerusalem when Jesus walked through its streets, and spoke in the porches of the Golden Temple, in his first letter to the Christians who lived in the Greek town of Corinth, asked them, if they did not know that they were each like a beautiful house fit for God to dwell in, and that the presence of God was in every one of them. And Jesus also

told His disciples that the presence of His Father in Heaven dwelt with them, and would be in them. Now, no one writes more lovingly for little children in the Bible than John the beloved disciple, and in the most beautiful of his short letters, he says, "We know and believe the love which God has in us, for God is love, and every one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him."

You know that Jesus ever called God His "Father in Heaven," notably in that simple beautiful prayer which He gave to His disciples on one of their journeys from the Lake-side to Jerusalem. And He taught us to do the same. You know it well. It begins with these loving words—

*Our Father which art in Heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name!*

And so we call God our Heavenly Father,

and love Him whom Jesus loved. And in a hundred different ways Jesus spoke of God as His and our Heavenly Father, and taught the people that God is the Heavenly Father of us all, and that His love and kindness are constant towards us; and one day He told His disciples that His Heavenly Father was more ready to do good to little children than their own fathers could ever be.

Helped by the beautiful life and words of Jesus, we learn to turn to God as our Heavenly Father, and to love Him more and more, and to feel and know that He loves us, because of His telling us what is good and joyful to do, and in helping us to do it. We hardly need look into our Bibles, to see what the good men wrote about our Heavenly Father's love for us, which is greater than that of our own father, but there we find, among the

wise sayings of King Solomon, that God loves every one that follows after righteousness. And, speaking of that wisdom which begins with knowing God, he says, "I love them that love Me, and they that seek Me early shall find Me."

None but a loving Heavenly Father would so care for us, as to tell us what is right and good to do. None but a loving God would wish to keep us from harm and sorrow, and whatever is bad is harmful. In loving good things we are led to love our Heavenly Father more, who is the cause of all good. We love Him, because He loves us, and the more we rejoice to do His will the more do we show our love for Him. You love your mother, and you know she loves you, by the hundreds of kind things she does for you, and you show your love for her in many ways by doing what she

asks you; and in like manner you will turn to God, and show your love for Him.

Jesus loved God, and rejoiced to call Him His Father in Heaven, and to do His will, and speaking to the people in the great Golden Temple at Jerusalem, He told them that He did not seek to do His own will, but the will of His Father in Heaven, and that even if they did not believe His words, they should believe the deeds of God which He did, that they might know and understand that God was in Him, and He in God.

How good, how loving was Jesus! How good, how loving is a little child! Who can be more loving than you, little children! of whom Jesus said as He sat in the wayside shadow of the hot, dusty, Perea road, when the disciples would have kept them and their mothers back from Him :—

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*Allow the little children
To come to Me,
And forbid them not !
For of such
Is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

He dearly loved these little children. God was in Him, loving them, and they loved Him dearly in return. And you will learn to love God, your Heavenly Father, who loves you with all the love that was seen in Jesus. And it is this sweet lovingness which naturally draws little children close to their Heavenly Father, and which makes them so like Jesus. And it is of this drawing to Him, that Paul speaks when he says, in one of his short letters to his friends in the town of Corinth, that God was in Jesus drawing men to love Himself.

Little children can show their love and obedience towards their Heavenly Father by loving each other, and by being gentle and

kind, for Jesus told His disciples, when they were alone with Him, that they were to be like brothers, and to love each other as He loved them, and then everybody would know that they were His disciples. And so, if you are loving and kind, people will see that you are a little follower of Jesus, and servant of God. And John, the beloved, who was at the table with Jesus, sitting at his side and hearing every word when He spoke, tells us in his life of Jesus in the Bible, that, "We love God, because He first loved us. If any person should say, 'I love God,' and does not love his own brother, he says what is not true, for if he does not love his own brother whom he sees, he cannot love God whom he does not see. Whoever loves God must love his brother also."

And so, to be like Jesus, to obey Him, you

will love, not only your brothers and sisters, but everybody, and animals also, for it is so very easy for children to be loving. And who does not love a little child? for Jesus loved them much. In a fisherman's cottage, one day, by the side of the beautiful blue lake of Gennesaret, He told His disciples that little children are the favourites of God, and that they were never to harm them. He also said, that they live in a happy kingdom with God as their King and Heavenly Father.

"See that you do not think lightly of little children," He said, "for I tell you that in Heaven their angels do always see the face of God, My Father in Heaven," adding, "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." And all this was said with one of the fisherman's half-naked little boys sitting beside Him, as the example

of the kind of little child He was speaking about. And of the children brought to Him on the Perean road, He also said, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

What is a Kingdom and a King, and what is this Kingdom of Heaven? A king is one who tells his people what they are to do, and the people of His Kingdom are they who obey Him. You are one of the little children of your Heavenly Father's Kingdom, and He is your King, for He loves you and tells you what you must do, and you love and obey Him. And this kingdom of His is *here in this world*, but you cannot see it, for it is not in one place, or in another place, but is all over the world, in the hearts of men, women, and little children. Wherever there is a child who obeys God, there is a little one of His Kingdom. And good men say that there is

no greater Kingdom, and no greater King than God your Heavenly Father, whom to know is to love and obey. And what do you think is the first rule of His Kingdom? Jesus told it to a clever Lawyer who asked Him the question one day, as he was passing near the rose gardens of Jericho, and this is it: "Love God, and love everybody." And so His law is all in one little word, "Love;" a little word of four letters, surely simple enough for you and me, and easy enough to obey.

You will remember, then, that your Heavenly Father loves and cares for you, and that you love Him and all that is good like Him, and that the way to show your love for God is by obeying Him, as you obey your dear mother, because you love her so.

DOING HIS WILL.

THERE is not a sweeter sight in the world than a little child asleep, with rosy cheeks and parted lips; and some little children sleep so soundly that we can take them up in our arms and carry them from one room to another, and they do not know we have done it. Then we say he is *unconscious*, for he knows nothing of what is going on around him; and when he awakes, we say he is *conscious* again, for he knows what is going on. The knowledge which you have of the will of God, men call your *Conscience*, because you are *conscious*,

you know what is right for you to do. *Conscience* is not a thing, but only a name for this knowledge of the will of God, just as *awake*, is not a thing, but only a name for not being asleep.

A little boy wishes to steal apples. He goes over, he looks at them through the broken hedge of the orchard. But something says, "No! Don't do it. It is wrong." Conscience is telling him what is God's will for him, and he goes away a happier boy for having done right.

As I have said, everybody has this *Conscience*, or knowledge of the will of our Heavenly Father, and it is convenient to have a short word to call it by when we wish to speak of this knowledge. In some people consciousness of His will is quicker and clearer than in others, and this depends upon the

quietness and care with which they wait on God to know His will. They who attend most to Him, who try to obey Him best, have the quickest and clearest consciousness of His will; and they who are careless, who do not attend to His way, or who disobey it, have their consciousness dulled, and less quick to guide and check them. We know that when we would do wrong, or have done wrong, the consciousness of our Heavenly Father's will checks us, and we feel bad, afraid, unhappy; while, when we would do right, or have done right, we feel encouraged, confident and happy, for we are obeying God our Heavenly Father. This, men call having a good or having a bad conscience, according as we have done good or bad. Nothing makes us more unhappy than knowing that we

have done wrong, and nothing makes us happier than knowing that we have obeyed our Heavenly Father. Peter, the rugged fisherman of Capernaum, who was Jesus' chief disciple, in one of his short letters in the Bible, calls this happy state, "The answer of a good conscience towards God," and nothing can be fuller of joy, peace and confidence, than knowing that our Heavenly Father is with us in what we do.

A little girl has plucked flowers which she should not have taken. Her mother questions her, and if she knew she was doing wrong, she stands before her mother with blushing cheeks and drooping head; but if she did not know, she looks up fearlessly into her mother's eyes, and tells her so.

It was this consciousness which made the life of Jesus so strong, peaceful, joyful.

Speaking to the crowds in the Golden Temple on the last day of their great Festival of Bowers, when the people left their homes and lived outside in bowers of green branches, He told them that He came not to do his own will, but the will of His Father in Heaven. And when alone with His disciples, He told them that God who dwelt in Him, did His will through Him, adding "Peace I leave with you ; My peace I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled or afraid." They were to obey their Heavenly Father as He did, and not to be frightened, and they would have the peace which he had.

You have heard of the sailor's compass? The next time you are in a ship, go and look at it. When the sailor is in darkness on the wide sea, he looks at his compass, and

it points the way for him to go; and a good sailor is very careful that his compass is right, that it truly points the right way. He cannot *see* what makes it do so, but he takes all the care he can that it should be right, and then he trusts it. And so, although we cannot *hear* our Heavenly Father telling us what is right for us to do, we should, by waiting in stillness and in prayer on Him, take all the care we can that nothing on our part shall prevent our knowing what is His will for us, and then trust and obey that consciousness without fear. And the more we love and obey our Heavenly Father, the clearer and quicker will our knowledge of his will,—which men call *conscience*—become.

You have seen an old sun-dial in a garden. As long as it is in the sun we can tell

the time from the soft shadow which lightly falls there. The clearer the sun, the stronger the shadow; and we cannot tell the time without the sun upon it. So we must take great care that nothing hinders us from waiting upon our Heavenly Father, and learning what His will is for us to do. And just as the sun makes glad the little flower in the field that holds up its face to the sky, so will the presence of God in you make you joyful and strong wherever you may be.

You will remember, then, that what men call your conscience, is your consciousness or knowledge of your Heavenly Father's will, and that by waiting on Him you will have His guidance ever clear and quick in a way that you cannot mistake.

TRUSTING IN HIM.

IT is very easy to say "yes," and it is very easy to say "no," but often the one leads to happiness, and the other to sorrow, and while it is not hard to obey the will of your Heavenly Father, it is easy to disobey Him. Just as we can shut out the light from a room and make it partly dark, or almost quite dark, so we can refuse to obey God if we wish. And as I have said, the oftener we refuse to obey our Heavenly Father, the less do we care, or think about what we are doing, and thus His guidance grows less and less for us, and we feel less disposed to wait

on Him, and more taken up with our own way. Now this would be a very sad, careless, and wilful state to get into, taking our own way, as if, after all we had heard, we thought ourselves wiser and purer and better than God. And if this indifference to our Heavenly Father were to grow upon us, it would bring sorrow and trouble and doubt and terror as to what we had done, and as to what we were doing; for we can never have the peace and joy of Jesus when we know we are disobeying God.

You have heard much of the joy and peace of obedience. It is beautifully told in the Bible in one of the songs of King David, in words like these:—

The love of God is perfect,
Restoring us ;
The teaching of God is sure,

Making wise the simple.
The instruction of God is right,
Refreshing the heart ;
The commands of God are pure,
Bringing light to the eyes.
More are they to be wished for
Than pure gold,
Sweeter are they than honey,
Sweeter than the honeycomb.
They who serve God,
Are warned by them,
And in keeping them,
There is great reward.

This glad and willing obedience to our Heavenly Father is called in the Bible "Walking with God," that is, having the presence of God as our Guide. You have heard of angels attending on good men, but never angel more beautiful or more helpful waited on a little child than this presence of God that waits on you.

King David, speaking of God as his Guide,

says in one of his beautiful songs, that is a prayer to God for clearer guidance—

Make me to know
Thy loving kindness, in the morning,
For I trust in Thee :
Make me to know
The way in which I should walk,
For I lift up myself to Thee.

We read of good men in the Bible who walked thus with God, and indeed we do not read of any great and good men at any time, but we find that they walked with God, and felt strong in their trust in Him. They waited on God, they prayed to their Heavenly Father to know His will, and they obeyed Him above all, as you in your prayers will wait and in your little deeds of every day, will earnestly strive to do. James, who is thought to have been

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one of Jesus' disciples, in his short, strong letter in the Bible, says that while they who obey God have a sure and joyful Helper, they who do not trust in Him have no certain guide, and are like waves of the sea tossing to and fro in the wind. And Isaiah, the man of God, in a joyful song, says of those who so trust—

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,
Whose mind is stayed on Thee,
Because he trusts in Thee.
Trust in God always,
In Him is strength for ever.

When you grow up you will hear men say that we should not trust what we cannot see. But the greatest things are unseen. God, Life, Thought, Mind, all are unseen. According to such men, we should not believe that there is air or wind, heat or

cold, that God is, or that Jesus lived, because we cannot see them. But we know what the wind is, for it strikes a thousand leaves into life in the tree, it moves the clouds like marled fleeces over the sky, it blows the white sailed ships across the sea, blowing them home. And our Heavenly Father, though unseen, is felt by us each day, holding out to us what we ought to do, in a way that cannot be better told than in these words of King Solomon about this highest wisdom of all, the knowledge of God—

Happy is he that getteth wisdom,
For the getting of it
Is better than silver,
And the gain of it
Than fine gold :
It is more precious than rubies,
And nothing that you can wish for,
Is to be compared to it.

In one hand is long life,
In the other, riches and honour :
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.

As the sailor lifts his snowy sail, so should we hold ourselves up to God, that under His guidance we may daily move in the paths of goodness. I have told you to trust in your Heavenly Father, but again King Solomon expresses what I wish to say in words that you will try to remember.

Trust in God with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding ;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will direct your paths ;
Be not wise in your own conceit,
Wait on God, and turn away from badness.

You will remember, then, that there are many great things in life that you cannot see,

and knowing that God is your Heavenly Father, and your gentle Guide, you will trust Him, and turn away from all bad things which would cause you to forget Him.

WITHOUT GOD.

YOU have heard much of the peace and joy of knowing and obeying your Heavenly Father, and I will now tell you something of the sorrow of disobedience. Have you ever been in a perfectly dark room in the day-time, when all was bright sunshine outside, and you heard the singing of birds and the soft rustling of leaves at the window, and thought of the green grass and the bright flowers in the fields? If you were to make a small chink in the shutter, a ray of light like a silver arrow would instantly dart across the room, to vanish should you place your

finger on the chink, making all dark again. *Darkness, is the want of light.* And we know that the golden broom on the river's bank is golden because of the light, that it is light which covers with pink blossom the swaying branches of the apple tree ; for light creates and makes things grow and bloom. Darkness, then, is the absence, the want of light, and were the world dark, we should have no growth, no flowers, no blossoms and fruits, no joy. Light is a joyous, life-giving thing, but darkness is nothing at all ; only the absence of light, deadness, blackness, gloom ; no light, no life, no joy anywhere. And we call darkness the opposite of light, although, correctly speaking, it is only the absence of light : no light anywhere.

I have told you that our Heavenly Father is the cause of all goodness in us, just as

light is the cause of all lovely fruits and flowers in the world. If we are without God, no good thing can come of us ; and just as we obey God much, or obey Him little, so are we good, or bad, in whatever we do. If we choose to take our own way, and disobey God, whatever we may then do is only bad, harmful, destructive ; just as I have told you darkness makes no lovely flowers or fruits in the world. When we refuse to obey our Heavenly Father, and take our own way, He is absent from whatever we may do, for it is then not *His will* that we do, but we are taking *our own way* without God and against God, and no good thing can come of it. Jesus has beautifully said, that we know a good tree by its fruits and flowers. And we know a good child, a child

of God, by the good things which he says and does.

To disobey our Heavenly Father, then, is to be without His presence in whatever we may do, and if we refuse to obey Him in anything, and always take our own way, although we know it is not His way, then we may be said to be without God in our life. Paul calls this being "Without God and without hope in the world." And of the people who disobey God, Isaiah sorrowfully says in the Bible—

Their thoughts are of badness,
Desolation and destruction are in their paths,
The way of peace they do not know,
And there is nothing right in their goings ;
They have made crooked paths,
And whoever goes in them does not know peace.

Whatever we may do that is not in obedience to our Heavenly Father's will, is

downward, harmful, destructive, for it is without God ; but all that we do in obedience to Him is upward, joyful, good ; and of such the wise king Solomon says, "Their path is as the light of the dawn, that shines more and more unto the perfect day."

Jeremiah, the prophet, in one of his prayers in the Bible, tells us that we cannot guide ourselves aright by our own knowledge, but should ever trust in God's guidance, in words like these—"Oh! God, I know that the way of man is not in himself; for it is not in man that goeth to guide his own steps." And in another place he gives this confident answer—

I, God, will give them one heart, and one way,
That they may always obey Me :
I will not turn away from doing them good ;
I will put obedience in their hearts,
And they shall not leave Me.

Jesus is "The Light of the World," and "The Light of Life," for He made God known to men as their Heavenly Father in a way that He had never been made known before; and in Himself he showed us God's perfect way to be good. "Whoever follows Me," He said, "shall not live in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life." "While you have the Light believe in the Light, that you may become Children of Light." And John, the beloved disciple, in the opening words of his first short letter, says, "This is the message which we heard from Jesus, and give to you. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

And thus we are told that our Heavenly Father's presence in us is like a light to guide us, and that to be without God is like being in darkness, with no sure way to trust and

go in, but wandering to and fro, taking our own way, not because it is bad, but because it pleases us at the time, and we wish to do it, although we know that it is not God's way, and cannot please Him. But this you will avoid by keeping your face ever turned towards your Heavenly Father, to know and obey Him, and you will rejoice with King David, who said that God's guidance was like a lamp to his feet and a light to his path.

Some people, when they feel inclined to do what is wrong, speak as if they were being tempted to do it by something outside of themselves, while the truth is, that they are wishing for a thing they know is contrary to the will of their Heavenly Father. They feel strongly inclined to disobey Him and take their own way instead,

because of the present pleasure they will have in doing this wrong thing, and they call this being tempted by a tempter. And when they give way, and do the wrong thing, they even then seek to blame someone else for what they have done; but these are only foolish attempts to deceive themselves, for they know that they could have refused to do wrong and could have done right if they had really wished to do so. They knew what the will of their Heavenly Father was, and that they should have given up their own will and desire, yet they chose to take their own way, feeling and knowing that it was wrong all the while. James says very plainly of this in his letter in the Bible—"Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God does not tempt any one. But every one is tempted

when he is drawn and enticed away from God, by his own strong wishes and desires."

And you will remember that to be bad is to be without God, and without joy in whatever you may do, taking your own bad way, although you know it is wrong and will end in sorrow, and that you must guard against this and not follow your own self-will when it is contrary to the will of your Heavenly Father.

SELF-WILL—THE TEMPTER.

THE first ray of light falling upon the world made the first shadow. In a dark room there are no shadows, but light a candle, and instantly your shadow leaps upon the wall. The knowledge of our Heavenly Father's will lets us know that the opposite of His will, or anything else than His will, is wrong, because it is not His will. And thus our Heavenly Father, by telling us what is right for us to do, also tells us what is wrong. Yet we are quite free to do what He tells us, or to follow our own desires and refuse to do it. This is called *Self-will*,

preferring our own way to God's way, setting ourselves up as wiser and better than God in regard to what we should do.

Sometimes our own wish is to do what our Heavenly Father tells us is right ; then obedience is delightful and easy ; but often our desires and passions are different from His will, and then there is a struggle between taking our own way, between Self-will and God's will, and that is how wrong-doing arises in us. It does not come from being tempted by anything outside of ourselves ; but, excited by our desires and passions, our own Self-will is the tempter. Thus wrong-doing begins when these passions and desires prevail on us to turn away from obeying our Heavenly Father, and to take our own way instead. Sometimes people give way to Self-will through carelessness, sometimes through

wrong feelings of liberality towards others; and sometimes by inflicting wrong punishments upon themselves,—then they are said to be their own worst enemy. But the commonest kind of Self-will is *selfishness*, when our desires and passions give present pleasure to ourselves, careless of the future and of whether it may bring joy or sorrow upon others; and this selfishness, ranging from giving present pleasure to ourselves, to inflicting cruelty upon others, *is the cause of most of the sorrow and misery in the world.*

Jesus, the beautiful One, is our great Example of loving unselfishness. He did not His own will, but the will of His Father in Heaven. He gave up Himself for men, He died for you and me. And as we love Jesus and wish to follow Him,

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we must also give up our own will when it would entice us away, and must obey our Heavenly Father as Jesus did ; for, to be Self-willed, to obey our own will rather than our Heavenly Father's will, is to be without God in whatever we may do, is to be bad and not good.

And this Self-will, in disobedience to our Heavenly Father, this wrong-doing, which is called "sin," "evil," "wickedness," "badness," is begun and carried on by ourselves alone. In His loving care for us God makes known His will that we may do it, and leaves us free ; our desires and passions excite us to take our own way, and we take it knowing it to be wrong, and thus badness is all of our own doing. When we do wrong, we cannot blame our Heavenly Father for it, for He tells us what is right to do. We

cannot blame our friends, or any outside tempter, we can only blame ourselves, for through Self-will we do it *of free choice*, preferring our own way to the will of God. Paul, in his letter to the youthful Titus, whom he had left behind him in his travels, teaches us to deny our own wishes when they are contrary to the will of God, saying that, "The favour of God has appeared to every one to save them from badness, teaching them that by obeying God, and resisting all desires that are contrary to His will, they should live quietly and obedient to Him in this world."

I have told you that when people feel strongly inclined to take their own way in disobedience to our Heavenly Father, they say they are being tempted to do wrong. And so they are, but it is their own Self-will

which tempts them. In other things, which are not matters of right and wrong, they also speak of being "tempted," and then what they mean is, *that they would like very much to do the thing, but they know it would be wiser to do something else*, and so they settle to do the wise thing, or, it may be, the foolish thing. And so also in things which *are* matters of right and wrong, our self-will tempts us to do what is not merely a foolish thing but a bad and wrong thing, knowing all the time that it is not right.

It would of course be nonsense to say that our Heavenly Father tempts us away from Himself; and as people do not like to blame themselves, they have sought to put the blame of their wrong-doing upon some one else, and so they speak of a tempter outside of themselves, whom they blame for what are

their own faults. This thing they have called "devil," "satan," "evil spirit," and many other names, and a very good man, at one time, believing he saw this tempter in his room, flung his ink-bottle at it, but the only result was a splutter of ink, and a crash of his bottle on the wall, for he had flung it at nothing. Some people have imagined this tempter, or devil, to be a great person, more beast than man, and have drawn pictures of it, with a hairy body and horns and a barbed tail that frighten little children. They have even drawn ugly pictures of many tempters, or devils, big and little, just as you might draw anger as a monkey, falsehood as a serpent, cruelty as a tiger, greed as a toad, and selfishness as a wasp. But pictures of tempters or devils, while often amusing, are always false and foolish

things, so that you need pay no heed to them.

Strange to tell, people who say there is a tempter outside of themselves, whom they blame for their wrong-doing, also say that more people in the world obey this tempter than obey God; which is like saying that this thing is more powerful than God, and that would be a very strange thing to say. Knowing that the only tempter is our own Self-will, excited by our own desires and passions, you will not be led away by man's fondness for personifying things and calling them "He," until they get to believe that their own Self-will is a sort of man-brute outside of themselves. According to them there would be two Gods, a God of good, and a god of bad. But this cannot be, for, as I have told you, our Heavenly Father is a living Spirit

and the cause of all good, while badness is *not the presence of anything at all*, but only the absence of God, without God, in what we do. Tempter or devil, then, is not a Spirit, or even a thing, but is only another name for our own Self-will, excited into opposition to our Heavenly Father's will, by those wishes, desires, and passions within us which would persuade and entice us to reject the way which He has made known, and to take our own Self-willed, selfish way instead. Other tempter there is none.

And while it is true that many people follow their own Self-will, rather than the will of God their Heavenly Father, these are the people who do harm in the world, for they are not great or good. But it is *not* true that our Self-will, excited by these passions and desires, is stronger than His presence within us, if only we

pray and wait patiently on Him and earnestly try to obey. In a letter to his friends in the town of Corinth, Paul says that God is faithful, and will not let us be tempted more than we can resist, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, so that we may be able to resist the temptation, and obey Him. And James, in his short letter, says that we are to obey God, and to resist temptation, and it will leave us, and that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us.

Remember, then, that Self-will, excited by your wishes, desires, and passions, to disobey the will of your Heavenly Father, is the only tempter you have to fear; and that the way to resist such temptation is to draw close to Him, and He will help you to obey Him, and give you strength, peace, and joy in doing it.

THE JOY OF OBEDIENCE.

YOU are never happier than when you are good, because you know that you are doing what is right, and so it is that when we obey our Heavenly Father we are joyful, peaceful, confident, for our trust is placed in something far higher than ourselves. Jesus has said that the commands of our Heavenly Father are not heavy. They are indeed few and simple, and love makes them light; just the sort of love which makes you glad to obey your parents. This loving obedience, James, in his short letter, calls perfect liberty, for it frees us from the power of our Self-will, backed by many strong

passions and desires which would lead us astray. He says, "Whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, being not a hearer that forgets, but a doer that works, he shall be blessed." And Paul, in one of his letters, tells us that there is liberty wherever God is; and that, like a mirror reflecting the glory of God, we are changed by Him into the same image, from glory to glory.

While I have told you that in all questions of right and wrong, we have the clear guidance of our Heavenly Father if we wish for it, there are many things which are not questions of right and wrong and which we have to settle by our own common-sense for ourselves, and which are right for us to do, whichever way we may decide. So that you must not think, whenever there are two things to consider, that one must be right and the other

wrong. Both may be right, and then you have to judge for yourself which you will do, feeling sure that when it comes to be a question of right and wrong your Heavenly Father will direct you, for you are a little child of His Kingdom, and He will ever be near to guide you. Whether you should walk, or run, whether you should play one game or play another, are not matters of right and wrong, but are for your own common-sense to settle; but whether you should be kind or cruel, selfish or unselfish, these are very different things, for the one is good and the other bad. So that you must not be anxious about little things, but trust in your Heavenly Father, knowing that when it is a matter of right and wrong He will make His will known to you if you wish it. And it is a beautiful truth, that by waiting on Him we grow ever better

and wiser, so that we may not only do rightly but judge wisely.

Some kinds of wrong are worse than others. It is wrong to be careless, it is worse to be selfish, it is worst of all to be cruel or to be a hypocrite—that is one who knows he is bad, but who pretends to be good. So there are many kinds of wrong, great and little. It is wrong to wish to injure your brother; it is worse really to do it. Anger is a common cause of wrong-doing in little children, for when we are angry, hatred, cruelty and revenge fill our minds with such a rush, that we do bad things before we know what we are about. You will therefore guard against anger, and not let it be said that you were carried away into wrong-doing, because you could not keep your temper. The Bible teaches us that anger never brings about right doing for God, and James

beautifully says, that peacemakers are the children of God. We must therefore seek to obey our Heavenly Father not only in keeping from anger, but in all our likes and dislikes, for disobeying Him in these little things makes disobedience easy, and may bring us into greater faults, instead of our being kept away from them. When you are in any doubt, wait on your Heavenly Father and pray to Him, and He will make the way clear to you. When Jesus prayed in great sorrow in the moonlit olive garden near Jerusalem, when He knew that men were seeking to kill Him, He said to His Heavenly Father, "Not My will, but Thine be done."

Now, while there is only one way of doing what our Heavenly Father tells us to do, there are many ways of not doing it, just as if some one were to tell you to walk right forward to

a certain place, and you were to stand still, or to go to one side or to the other side, or to turn round and go backwards—all these would be disobeying the order to walk right forward. And so, when we know what our Heavenly Father wishes us to do, Self-will, excited by one desire after another, entices us to take our own way, and to do something different from His clear will, and it is often easier at the time to follow our own Self-will, than to deny ourselves and obey Him. But while it may be easier and may give us pleasure at the time, it is always less happy in the end; for disobedience brings its certain punishment in doubt, confusion, terror and pain, while everything which we do aright brings lasting peace, confidence and joy. This joy and confidence in obeying our Heavenly Father is beautifully described in the Bible as the fruit of right

doing. James, in his short letter, says that "The fruit of right doing is sown in peace of them that make peace ;" while Paul, in a letter to his friends in Galatia, tells them to walk by the Spirit, and they will not do their own bad wishes. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, goodness, kindness, modesty, self-control ; and Jesus Himself said, "In this is God glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so shall you be My disciples."

To obey our Heavenly Father, then, is to be at once confident and joyful, while to disobey Him is to be doubtful, and in the end miserable ; for to be good pleases our Heavenly Father, who will help us to be better, while to be bad is displeasing to Him, for it leads us to forget Him more and more, and to refuse His guidance which is ever gentle and loving. And in the doubt and fear of disobedience, we

lose that precious peace of Jesus, which Paul calls the peace of God that is greater than we can comprehend. And while, as I have said, our Heavenly Father's guidance is ever gentle and loving, and easily followed, and easily set aside, the Bible teaches us that His presence within us is greater than any fear or temptation that can trouble us, if we only wait on Him. John, the child-loving disciple, says in his first short letter—"You are of God, little children, and have won the victory ; for greater is He that is in you than any that is in the world."

"Fear not," said Jesus, as He stood under the blue April sky, on a thyme-sprinkled hill in Galilee, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Heavenly Father's pleasure to give you the Kingdom of Heaven." And again, speaking in the Golden Temple at the Festival of

Dedication in the winter time, He said, "My followers hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them Heaven. They shall never perish, and no one shall take them out of My keeping. My Father in Heaven, who gave them to Me, is greatest of all, and no one can take them out of His hand. I and My Father in Heaven are one Spirit." And speaking to the same people on that thyme-clad hill in Galilee, He said, "Not every one that calls Me "Lord!" shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only they that do the will of My Father in Heaven." I have told you already of this Kingdom of Heaven. Listen now to what Jesus said of it, in the beautiful prayer made at the end of His last meeting alone with his disciples in Jerusalem before His cruel death.

"And this is Heaven," He said, "to know

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Thee, the only true God, and Jesus, whom Thou hast sent." That is, to know God, our Heavenly Father, and to obey Him as Jesus did. To know and obey God, then, is to have Heaven, as Jesus had, and Paul tells us, in a letter to his friends at Rome, that this Kingdom of Heaven is the righteousness, joy, and peace of God in all who follow Him.

And so we see how strong, peaceful, and joyful are they who obey God, and who are the children of His Kingdom, of whom Jeremiah says in the Bible—

I will put My laws
Into their minds ;
And on their hearts
Will I write them ;
And I will be
A God to them,
And they shall be
To me a people.

All good and wise men say, that it is never difficult to know what our Heavenly Father would have us do, and that the best and greatest lives are they who in self-denial have known and obeyed Him best. And so we should rejoice, as our Heavenly Father's will becomes more and more our will, as King David rejoiced when he said,

Oh ! how I love Thy law !
I think of it all the day.
How sweet are thy words
To my taste !
Sweeter than honey
To my mouth.
Through Thy wisdom
I get understanding,
Therefore I hate
Every false way.
I will sing to God
As long as I live,
I will praise God
As long as I have life.

And as you grow older you will find that in yielding up your will in obedience to your Heavenly Father, duty and pleasure go together—duty to Him, and joy to yourself, and it will become your sweetest peace and highest joy, the very flower and crown of every day, to live near to Him and to feel His gentle presence in the purity of your heart and life.

Remember, then, that obedience to your Heavenly Father is not hard, but joyful, and that trusting in Him you have confidence and strength, knowing that He that is with you is greater than anything that can be against you.

JESUS IN GALILEE.

YOU have often heard of the beautiful One who went about in Palestine doing good, and who loved the little children of that country, and spoke to them and blessed them. The name of Jesus is known now all over the world, and the best men everywhere are they who are most like Him, for He showed us more about how to know and obey God, about how to be good, than any other ever did. Although it is so very long ago since He lived in Galilee, His life has come down to us so beautifully told by those who lived with Him, that we seem as if we had

seen Him for ourselves, standing in His white tunic under a spreading green tree, with the children of the village, fair and dark, young and old, clustered round Him, and had heard His sweet voice telling them to be good, and saying to their mothers, that their own bright laughing children were the little ones of His very Kingdom of Heaven.

His home was in Nazareth, a country village among the wooded Highlands of Galilee. His mother was the Village Maiden, and His father the Village Carpenter. He Himself was also a maker of ploughs and wagons and other wooden things, until He was thirty years old, so that He is called the Carpenter of Nazareth. While living quietly there, He was much grieved with the false and foolish things which the teachers of Religion taught the people,

making the joyous service of God so difficult to learn and so hard to obey, that they could not understand it; and He felt that He must help them. Laying aside His Carpenter's tools, dressed in a soft white tunic that reached from His neck to His feet, with a rough blue cloak cast over His shoulder, a long stick in His hand, and leather sandals on His feet, He left His mother and His quiet home among the hills, to go down to the villages and towns of Galilee, a teacher of the will of God to men. He went forth to tell them the good news of the simple and easy way to know and obey God, the way to be good as God had made it known to Him. He said the people were like sheep wandering about without a shepherd, and that God had sent Him to be their Guide to lead them

back to Him. He was very beautiful, and no man ever spoke like Him, and He did so many kind things that the people, and little children too, followed Him in crowds along the hot dusty roads of that country to listen to His words, and to look at His face; and all the people said that He spoke very differently from their other teachers of Religion who were so hard and unkind, and who did not love and pity them as Jesus did.

There was a beautiful, deep blue Lake among the green hills of Galilee, and Jesus often sailed in the fishermen's boats there, and spoke to the people as they stood on the shore of rocks and shells and white sand, at the place where the red flowering oleanders touched the water's edge. He also walked through the corn fields and orchards, the

vineyards, and olive gardens, teaching in houses, and in small village churches wherever He went. He travelled on foot along the hot winding roads to distant Jerusalem, and there, in the Golden Temple, standing in His simple countryman's dress amid the great pillars of red and blue marble in the porches, He spoke of His Father in Heaven and of His will, to the thousands of people who came thither in their strange dresses from all parts of the country at the crowded Festival times. He called God His and our Heavenly Father, and the people loved to hear Him say so, for it made God so real, and brought Him so near to them all.

After three years, during which He went from place to place in winter and summer, crossing rivers, climbing hills, walking through the fields and vales, as He went from village

to village teaching everywhere God's simple way to be good, the other teachers of Religion got to hate Him so much for speaking against their hundreds of hard, needless rules which they had made out of the Bible, and for blaming them for hindering the people from being good, instead of helping, that they resolved to have Him taken a prisoner. They hated Him worst of all for saying He was the Christ sent from God, the long-expected Saviour of the people, and that God was in Him; and for this they said He should be put to death. So they had Him taken with soldiers in the middle of the night in a moonlit olive garden near Jerusalem, where He was praying with His disciples, and had Him, while still young, scourged and put to death with great pain. And the chief thing

they brought against Him was, that He had said He was the Christ, the Son of God, and for that He was crucified on a rising ground by the side of the road outside the city walls, where priests and soldiers might look down on Him, and where all who passed by might see Him hanging.

But we know that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, and the Saviour not only of His people, but of all in the world who believe on Him, and who try to know and obey their Heavenly Father, as He did.

HIS WAY TO BE GOOD.

INSTEAD of the cruel and unjust death of Jesus scattering His followers and putting an end to what He had taught, it only made them love and believe in Him more. They thought of His good and beautiful life; they thought of the hope which He gave to all who followed Him; of what he had told them about God as their Heavenly Father, and of the simple way to know and obey Him, the way to be good, of which He had told them so much, and had shown them so lovingly as He lived among them, until they came to trust in Him, and to call Him

Redeemer and Saviour from badness, as you and I do to-day. For all who believe in Jesus' way to be good, and who follow Him, are brought to know and obey God, and are saved from badness.

What we now call *Christianity* is the Religion of Jesus,—His way to be good,—and as He is the greatest that ever lived, so His way to know and obey our Heavenly Father is the best way. Almost all men admit that no one has ever lived a better life than He, and as it was by knowing and obeying God that His life was so great, I know you will try carefully and earnestly to learn all about Him, that you may be good as He was good. How He loved, honoured, and obeyed His Heavenly Father, what He thought about Him, what he said about Him, are the most precious things you can know. They are

wisdom of the highest, and knowledge of the best; for by them are you drawn and kept close to God, your Heavenly Father, just as if Jesus Himself were one day to take your little hand, and bid you kneel down at His side under the blue sky and among the sweet flowers and grass, and pray with Him to His Father and your Father, to His God and your God, to be with you and to guide you aright all your life. You would never refuse to do this, and neither will you refuse to pray as He did, and as He has told you to do.

The Bible teaches us that the knowledge of God is the beginning of wisdom, and what little child does not wish to be wise and good, what child does not long to know the best that can be known of Jesus and of God? Of this knowledge the Bible says

it is more precious than rubies and gold, and nothing that we can wish for is to be compared to it. And the knowledge of our Heavenly Father which Jesus gives is all the dearer and sweeter to you that it is very simple and easy to learn; for there is no teacher for little children like Jesus, who spoke to the village children of Galilee, and who praised them to His disciples.

He has told us that God is our Heavenly Father, and that He is a Spirit; and while He did not say what a Spirit is, He told Nicodemus, one of the chief men of Jerusalem, that a Spirit is like the wind in this, that we know that it is present, but we do not know whence it comes or whither it goes: and so is it with God. He said that God's presence is in us, and that whoever does good is honouring and obeying God, His Heavenly

Father. And so, in a few words, we learn from Him that we have our Heavenly Father's presence telling us what is right for us to do, that we may be good, as He was good.

While it is a very precious thing to be *told* by Jesus how to know and obey our Heavenly Father, it is a still more precious thing to be *shown* how to do so. What, then, was His way of waiting on God? He prayed to His Heavenly Father to be with Him and to make His will known to Him, and to help Him to obey. And that is what you will do. And what was His way of doing God's will? In the gentle deeds of an unselfish life. And that you will try to do. *Pray to your Heavenly Father; wait on Him, and learn His will, trust in Him, and do it.* How simple, joyful, easy it all is, when you think that

Jesus has told us and shown us how to do it, and that our loving Heavenly Father will help us. And Jesus also said, that in doing this we shall have His peace and joy, strength and hope, such as we cannot have in any other way.

Remember, then, that Jesus not only made plain the way to be good, by telling us of it, but walked in that way Himself, as our Hope and Guide, and that His way is simple, joyful, peaceful, full of loving trust in our Heavenly Father.

FOLLOWING HIM.

YOU now know what the Religion of Jesus is, and as it made Him great and good, so will it make you, if you try to be like Him. I have said that badness ever brings punishment, soon or late, just as poison will hurt you if you take it, for, while being good gives joy and peace, so being bad brings doubt, misery, and pain. We cannot expect our Heavenly Father to be pleased with us, if we think more of ourselves than of Him, and disobey Him, while, if we obey, we have Heaven here, and after death perfect union with Him in Heaven hereafter.

But, you may ask, if we are bad and disobey our Heavenly Father, are we never to be forgiven? Now you know that if you vex your mother and are sorry for it, and ask to be forgiven, she rejoices to see you good again, and forgives you freely, and with many caresses, and then you feel better and more resolved to be good and not to vex her again. Jesus has said that it is the same with our Heavenly Father. That He pities us with love greater than that of our own father or mother, and that if we are sorry for our faults, He will forgive us freely. *But we must be quite sure that we are truly sorry,* and must show our sorrow by praying to be forgiven, and by earnestly striving to do His will in the future, for God knows our thoughts, and while we may deceive our friends by pretending to be good, we cannot deceive Him. To be

forgiven we must not only be really sorry for what we have done, but we must also be good afterwards, for that is the only right sign that we have truly changed from bad to good.

And so, by telling of the love of God, Jesus drew the people to Him, and is it any wonder that men call Him their Saviour and best Friend, for indeed He lived and died to draw all men to Him, and through Him to God.

Jesus told the people to believe on Him, to follow Him, to be like Him, that His words were messages from God, and that if they followed Him they would be brought to know and obey God their Heavenly Father; and this He called spreading the Kingdom of Heaven in the world. Heaven, He told them, was in the hearts of all good men,

women, and little children, so that the more we obey God, the more we shall be brought into union with our Heavenly Father, until the day comes which we need not fear, when we shall have perfect union with Him after death. Jesus, shortly before His death, told His sorrowing disciples not to grieve, for He was going to God His Father in Heaven, and that whither He went they would also go.

While all good men have been in part like Jesus, no one has ever come near Him in goodness. So good and kind was He, so full of tenderness and love and pity, that in Him we have God seen in the world in a man's shape, and know that His presence will be in all good men who trust in Him and obey Him as Jesus did. We have thus in Him the one Example to follow

and believe in, the perfect way of life to strive after, and the more we are like Him, the more like our Heavenly Father do we become ; for whoever follows Jesus must obey Him, and in loving Jesus we love God in Him.

Some men would have us obey our Heavenly Father through fear, or for rewards ; through fear of punishments which may befall us after death for badness, or through desire for rewards for goodness which we may then receive. But it is better that you should fix your young thoughts on your present life, and on the world around you, and be good for love of God, of Jesus, and of goodness itself. You know of the joy and peace which goodness now gives, and that a good life in obedience to your Heavenly Father is all that is required of you, for it is the best service

you can render Him; and depend upon it, life with God here is the best surety you can have of life with Him hereafter. If you are bad, and are truly sorry for it and turn again, you may also feel sure, that your loving Heavenly Father, in His tender mercy, will pity and forgive you as Jesus has said, for He is not a God of cruelty and of punishment, but of love and forgiveness.

How beautiful, how good is the life of Jesus! how simple His Religion, the Religion of love and lowly service; how simple! compared with the countless orders, commands, and traditions of men which He came to set aside, *and did set aside forever*. And so it is that in following Jesus and obeying God you will be a loving, gentle, truthful child, full of confidence, peace, and joy, kept and guided by a Heavenly Father who was His

Keeper and Guide and is the Helper of all who follow Him.

You will remember, then, that God was seen in the world in all His love and pity in Jesus, and that in following and loving Him, you are brought to know, love, and obey His and your Heavenly Father who loves to pity, forgive and restore His dear children.

FAILURE IS IMPOSSIBLE.

IF any one should ask you what is your Religion, answer that it is the Religion of Jesus, His way to be good—and that it has only two things in it—

To know God,

To obey God.

And from these all good things flow.

To know God, as Jesus knew Him! *God, my Heavenly Father, is a Spirit, and His presence is in me, telling me what is right to do.* To obey God, as Jesus obeyed Him! *Pray to my Heavenly Father, and wait on Him to learn His will, and do that will in*

gentle and noble deeds to all around me, and when I fail, be truly sorry for it, beg to be forgiven, and earnestly try again. And in doing this you will have won the name which Jesus gave the little children who followed Him, running with naked feet along the dusty roads and over the flowery fields of Galilee so long ago, the name of a little child of His Kingdom of Heaven in the world—a name the letters of which are more precious than a string of pearls round your neck—a name that you will not part with during all your life.

Let no one confuse or deceive you by saying that you cannot know that God *is*, or what is His will. Your answer is sharp and complete, "Have you ever tried Jesus' way?" "Then try it!" He knew and obeyed God, and He said it was true that our

Heavenly Father makes known His will to us. *He, the purest that ever lived, said it was true! Think of it again and again!* Almost all men admit that no purer life was ever lived than Jesus' life, and if that be so, then His Religion, His way to be good, which made His life so good and great, must be the best for you and me. Does any one know of a better life than His; or a better way to be good than His way? a way that has brought about a better life among men. No one can tell you of a better life, or a better way. Then Jesus' way is the best, the only way for you and me. Or did He err when He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to God but through me?" No, He did not err! *There is no better life than His life, there is no higher truth than*

His truth, there is no other way than His way to come to God, by waiting on Him and doing His will as He did it.

Try it! Try thus to know and obey God, for each step of the way is marked with the footprints of Jesus. Put it to the test again and again, whenever doubt troubles you. Go over it once more. Begin afresh by asking your Heavenly Father to guide you, to show you what is right to do, and then do it with all your might, and you will find that, day by day, you are led to do what is right and not to do what is wrong, and that in this you have peace and joy, Heaven within you. And so in humble trust may you walk all your life with God your Heavenly Father, and learn in your daily experience something of the joy, peace, and sweetness of the life of Jesus, the blessed

One, the spreading of whose Kingdom will transform, and is transforming the world. And not to yourself alone, but to all who ask whence comes your confidence and hope, answer "From God, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus," and say, "Try it," "Try Jesus' way to know and obey God." Do not hesitate, for, believe me, *Failure is impossible.*

And as one of the little ones of His Kingdom of Heaven in the world, of love, joy, and peace in the hearts of all men and women and little children, who, like you, have come to know and obey their Heavenly Father, may these beautiful words of the minstrel King be your prayer and song—

The Lord is my Shepherd !
I shall not want :
He maketh me to lie down
In green pastures ;

He leadeth me beside
The still waters,
He restoreth me,
And guideth me,
In the paths of Righteousness,
For His sake.
Though I walk
Through the valley
Of the shadow of death,
I will fear no harm,
For Thou art with me,
And Thy rod, and staff,
They shall comfort me.
Surely goodness and mercy
Shall follow me
All the days of my life.
And I shall dwell
In God's house forever.

